

# conducting orchestra york into the future

by Roslyn Angel

**A** new hand will be holding the conductor's stick for Orchestra York this year. Kathleen Ash Barraclough is the latest addition to York's faculty of fine arts.

Barraclough was approached and hired by York in August to take a position in the music department, teaching courses in conducting, orchestra, winds symphony and string ensemble.

Born in Vancouver, Barraclough moved to Washington, D.C. at age six. Her interest in music began when she was eight years old, when her parents encouraged her to learn violin. But why did she choose a career in music?

Barraclough explained, "Most professionals begin somewhat unwillingly, but your parents keep you going. Within the first four years, you begin to love what you are doing." By age 13, Barraclough was already teaching violin. Future career aspirations in the field of music were inevitable.

Barraclough has a Bachelor's degree in music from the University of Washington, a Master's in music from the University of Southern California and has taken numerous additional studies, such as advanced orchestra conducting.

Her primary instrument is violin, but she also plays the viola, guitar and piano, as well as being a trained opera singer. In addition, she has written "a few compositions which have been performed by the South Valley Symphony in California."

Over the years, Barraclough has acquired numerous awards but, fixed in her memory, is one given to her in 1985. "I was chosen as outstanding woman in the arts, in Santa Clara County, California," she said.

Barraclough's career as both a conductor and violinist has taken her to Austria, Hungary and all over the United States. She also spent 14 years as conductor for the South Valley Symphony, a position she left when she was hired by York.

At the same time as York's job offer, Barraclough was asked to fill a similar position at a junior college in California. She decided to choose York because, "It just seemed right; and that is the best answer I can give."

So far, her stay at York has been more than pleasurable. "I enjoy the students here at York. My experience is that they are very bright, knowledgeable and kind, especially when they find me lost around campus," she said with a smile. "These buildings must have been designed by a maze expert."

A dedicated conductor, Barraclough has many hopes for York. She would like "to make Orchestra York a greater presence on campus" and hopes "to increase the number of string students."

"I would also like to have string ensemble performances on campus, so people know we are here; so that all of the York colleges are aware of these performance groups, both for their own performance interest, or as listeners to the fine music we are presenting," she added.

The most significant reason for Barraclough's commitment to music is that she experiences "immense joy when I'm on stage hearing the beautiful sounds from the group. It's very exhilarating."

Barraclough's ambition seems to be unending. There are many places to which she would still like to travel, and many works she would like to perform. But for now, Barraclough seems quite content with her new position and feels that she'll "be here for a long time."



Roslyn Angel

Orchestra York's new conductor, Kathleen Ash Barraclough.

# the writer's block

by Ira Nayman

**I**nvariably, somebody will ask me where I get my ideas.

Writing is, in the beginning, about seeing the world, about making connections between events and emotions that most people cannot (or will not) make for themselves. Only after a writer has decided what themes and observations about human nature she or he wants to write about can she or he begin to structure a story that will develop those themes or observations. Now, I'm the only person I've ever known who would rather listen to others than talk about myself. I've trained myself to notice things in my environment and I read voraciously.

But, that's only half the story. There is, what I think of as a zen space in my mind, a place of calmness where I'm totally unconcerned with day-to-day worries, where the connections are made, the ideas developed. A more modern description if you prefer, is that there is a specific part of my unconscious devoted to making connections. Beyond this I don't like to speculate, in part because I'm afraid if I subject sub-rational processes to too

much rational scrutiny, my creative source will dry up.

Recognizing from an early age that most people weren't in touch with this part of themselves, I have often tried to explain what my life is like to others, usually without success. I try once more: think about the surprise and delight you feel when you hear a funny line on television or in a movie (this is sometimes referred to as the "shock of recognition"). Now, imagine, if you can, getting that feeling from somewhere inside yourself instead of outside, and having it all the time. That's sort of what my life is like.

Several things naturally follow. I always carry a notepad and pens because I never know when an idea will occur to me, and I've forgotten too many ideas in the past to take the chance of not writing them down immediately. While some people think this makes me look like a nerd (perhaps with some justification), I long ago stopped worrying about the opinions of people who have to reduce others to easy stereotypes.

Sometimes I will have to write something down in the middle of a conversation with somebody else. Ninety-nine times out of a

100, it will have no connection with what has been discussed; my mind is like a computer suddenly popping up with the answer to a problem it has been working on for several hours. After I've explained this to my friends a half dozen times, they seem to accept it. (I make it known I have strict rule that, aside from the occasional mannerism or phrase, I do not use my friends as models for characters in my writing, which tends to be a great relief all around.)

Once in a long while, I will laugh at something I've been thinking, involuntarily, as most laughter begins. This is, of course, embarrassing, especially if the subject of conversation is African famine relief, or something equally weighty. One major element of humour is spontaneity, and I find it next to impossible to explain a joke without ruining it, so my friends know not to press me for an explanation.

There are more serious problems with this way of living. I still find it difficult to generate ideas knowing it will be many months, if not years, before I have another opportunity to embark upon a major writing project. It's

more than a little frustrating to continue generating ideas I may never use.

But, the alternative (every writer's nightmare) is infinitely worse: that, through lack of use, this talent will dry up. This ability has never been continuous or predictable, and there have been times, occasionally lasting months, when I was unable to concentrate on writing. My experience has been that if I waited the dry periods out, my muse would return; but (with my attention on other things like school), I'm afraid this may not be the case.

So, what? Well, in the first column, I mentioned that my identity revolves around being a writer. This was not merely rhetoric: seeing the world in a different way than most people is what makes me uniquely me. (Perception and identity, in my case, being strongly linked.) Losing this ability would be like losing a vital organ: life would be very difficult.

So, in conclusion, let me just say that . . . well, umm . . . there really is nothing to say in conclusion. I guess I'll just have to keep adding words until I run out of . . .

